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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9955

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN IMMEDIATE

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0130

RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 000813

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STATE FOR D, P, EAP/MLS, DS/IP, DS/IP/EAP, DS/TIA/PII

STATE ALSO FOR CA/OCS, INR/GGI- R. MILEFSKY

BANGKOK FOR POL - D. GREENBERG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/03/2018

TAGS: PREL ASEC KTIA MOPS TH CB

SUBJECT: SHOOTING INCIDENT NEAR PREAH VIHEAR

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I. PIPER CAMPBELL.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: A Royal Cambodian Government (RGC) official who leads border negotiations with Thailand reported a "clash between the two sides" the afternoon of October 3 in disputed territory near the Preah Vihear temple resulting in the wounding of one Cambodian soldier. The source called the report from the Ministry of Defense preliminary and details remain sketchy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is expected to lodge a formal protest with the Thai embassy. It is too early to tell how the government will treat the incident in the local press; past less-violent altercations at Preah Vihear have been kept quiet or been downplayed although Thai-Cambodian issues have, in the past, inflamed public opinion and led to riots. No new bilateral border talks have been scheduled, although officials have been telling the local press that Prime Minister Hun Sen will raise the border issue during the October 13 visit by Thai Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat. Charge will continue to urge restraint by the government in response to this latest incident. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Details of the incident have already surfaced in the international press. Phay Siphan, Secretary of State in the Council of Ministers, confirmed to us that the Thai fired upon the Cambodian soldiers with M-79 rockets and M-16 rifles. The Cambodians responded with B-40 rockets and AK-47 machine guns. The firefight lasted about five minutes, he told us. Phay Siphan said the Thai unit was comprised of about 30 soldiers, the Cambodian unit about 17.

¶3. (C) Var Kim Hong (strictly protect), Senior Minister and Chairman of the RGC Joint Border Commission, reported the clash to A/DCM late October 3 noting that the information was preliminary. He said that at about 3:00 p.m. a Cambodian mobile patrol walking along Phnom Trap (Trap Mountain) west of the Preah Vihear temple complex entered an area previously called "prohibited" by the Thai. The Thai soldiers spotted the Cambodian unit and "opened fire on the Cambodian soldiers," he said. In a follow-up call, Var Kim Hong confirmed that one Cambodian soldier was shot and wounded and that the Cambodian unit had responded by firing a B40 rocket at the Thai. He stated that the area in which the dispute occurred is claimed by both sides on their respective maps. The source did not have details and was quick to call the report "preliminary."

¶4. (C) Var Kim Hong noted that the matter was being handled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and that the MFA planned to file a formal note of protest with the Thai embassy in Phnom Penh. Phay Siphan added that MFA Secretary of State Long Visalo was handling the matter. In the meantime, DPM Sok An was seeking to keep the RGC response muted and police were boosting security in order to keep in check any

potential public over-reaction, said Phay Siphan.

¶15. (C) Charge is seeking out MFA interlocutors over the weekend to inquire about the RGC response and to urge continued restraint.

¶16. (C) Var Kim Hong passed the news of the incident after noting to A/DCM that the Cambodian side had not yet confirmed any of the additional bilateral talks which had been discussed in August between the Thai and Cambodian Foreign Ministers. These include further talks at the Foreign Minister level, talks between military negotiators to discuss modalities to "re-deploy" troops away from the disputed border territory, and the convening of the Joint Border Commissions from the two sides to continue technical talks on the border.

¶17. (C) COMMENT: In the recent past, the RGC has played down altercations along the border and has managed public press coverage so as not to stir up public opinion. We don't know if recent displays of impatience with the on-again-off-again bilateral talks have changed that general low-key posture. END COMMENT.)

CAMPBELL